

AKBAR AND HIS INDIA

Edited by
IRFAN HABIB

DELHI
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
CALCUTTA CHENNAI MUMBAI
1997

Revisiting Fatehpur Sikri

An Interpretation of Certain Buildings

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Since the monumental work of E.W. Smith in four volumes, much has been written about Fatehpur Sikri, the imperial city of Akbar. Apart from a large number of papers and articles published in various journals, a number of books have also appeared.¹ A perplexing problem has been the nomenclature of buildings, with various authors using different names for the same buildings. Then again there is the problem of the popular attributions circulated sometime in the previous century and accepted by archaeologists and historians. A recent work broadly divided the monuments into two categories: those that have been mentioned in the Persian sources and those that have not.² Another controversy regarding this city is of a more recent origin: Is Fatehpur a planned city, like the later Shahjahanabad laid out by Akbar's grandson, or did it evolve gradually. A. Petruccioli tries to persuade us to the former view,³ although a reading of the sources leads to a contrary conclusion. Much may be learnt in time by careful archaeological work. In the 1970s a joint team of archaeologists of the Archaeological

¹ Eg., S.K. Banerji, 'Buland Darwāza of Fatehpur Sikri', *London Historical Quarterly*, XIII, 1937; idem, 'A Historical Outline of Akbar's Darul Khilāfat, Fatehpur Sikri', *Journal of Indian History*, XXI, 1942; Fr. Heras, 'The Palace of Akbar at Fatehpur Sikri', *JIH*, 1925; Ashraf Husain, *A Guide to Fatehpur Sikri*, Delhi, 1947; A.B.M. Husain, *Fatehpur Sikri and its Architecture*, Dacca, 1970; Muḥammad Sayeed Marahravi, *Tārīkh-i Fatehpur* (Urdu), 1905; S.A.A. Rizvi, *Fatehpur Sikri*, New Delhi, 1972; S.A.A. Rizvi & V.J.A. Flynn, *Fatehpur Sikri*, Bombay, 1975; Michael Brand and Glenn D. Lowry (ed.), *Fatehpur Sikri: A Source Book*, Massachusetts, 1985.

² Michael Brand and Glenn D. Lowry (ed.), op. cit.

³ Atilio Petruccioli, *La Citta' Del Sole & Delle Acque Fatehpur Sikri*, Rome, 1988.

Survey of India and the Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, excavated a number of sites around the palace complex pertaining to 'nobles' complexes, bazar, stables, harem, etc.', a detailed report of which is yet to be published.⁴

The present paper is an attempt to identify certain structures which have so far escaped the eye of scholars, despite the fact that some of the so-called unidentified structures might, after all, have been mentioned by contemporary chroniclers. An attempt is also made to present in summary the results of a survey of the remains at Fatehpur Sikri which was undertaken by me first in May 1989 and then, subsequently, on different occasions till the first week of October 1992.⁵

The most detailed contemporary description of Fatehpur Sikri is given by Father Monserrate, who visited the court in 1580 along with Fr. Acquiviva and Fr. Henriques. He writes:

Unlike the palaces built by other Indian kings, they are lofty; for an Indian palace is generally as low and humble as an idol-temple. Their total circuit is so large that it easily embraces *four great royal dwellings*, of which the King's own palace is the largest and the finest. The second palace belongs to the queens, and the third to the royal princes, whilst the fourth is used as a store house and magazine.⁶

The 'King's own palace' was divided into two parts, the *daulatkhāna* and the *diwānkhāna-i 'ām*. Describing the latter, which he calls *daulatkhāna-i 'ām*, Badāūnī informs us that it consists of '114 *aiwāns* (porticos)'.⁷ This structure, where through the Emperor gave public audience, had four gateways, apart from the king's own personal entrance, which was secured a guard each. To quote Monserrate:

...various kinds of chains, manacles, hand-cuffs and other irons are hung

⁴ The Aligarh team worked under the directorship of Professor R.C. Gaur, who subsequently presented, in his Presidential Address at the Indian Archaeological Society, a preliminary report on 'The Archaeology of Urban Mughal India: Excavations at Fatehpur Sikri', Santiniketan, Dec. 1988.

⁵ Please see Plan at end of this paper, which incorporates the identifications of the buildings of the Palace complex made here. The author is beholden to Mr Zameer Ahmad of the Archaeology Section, Deptt. of History, AMU, and his colleagues, the late Mr Rajiv Sharma and Dr Jabir Raza, for accompanying him.

⁶ Monserrate, Fr. Anthony, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J.*, tr. J.S. Hoyland, London, 1922, p.199.

⁷ Badāūnī, *Muntakhabu-t Tawārīkh*, ed. M.A. Alvi, Calcutta, Vol.II, 1869, p.365.

up on one of the palace gateways, which is guarded by the aforementioned chief executioner. The other three gateways are guarded by the chief doorkeeper, the chief trainer of gladiators, and the chief despatch-runner respectively.⁸

Presumably, the chief doorkeeper stood at the gate which opens into the *daulatkhāna-i khāṣ*, in front of the hall with the Lotus Pillar. The chief despatch-runner might have stood near the gate which connects the building with the road leading to the Agra Gate, through the *Chahārsūq* Bazar, this being the shortest route out of the city. The gate opening towards the *ḥauṣ-i shīrīn* appears to have been the main door through which ceremonial entrance was provided to the nobility along with their retinue. Here possibly stood the chief executioner to instil awe and fear in their hearts. The chief trainer of the gladiators guarded the gate opening towards the south. A miniature depicts the entry of *bāzīgars* (tumblers) along with their animals through this gate.⁹

The *daulatkhāna-i khāṣ* appears to have been divided into two parts, namely the *daulatkhāna* and the *daulatkhāna-i anūptalāu*.¹⁰ Entry to this area was restricted to only a few and those whom the emperor personally invited. It is in this area of *daulatkhāna-i anūptalāu* that the *khilwatkada-i khāṣ* (the imperial chambers) and the *khwābgāh* (resting quarters) of Akbar are located. The area got its name from Anūp Talāu, a *ḥauṣ* (water tank) constructed in this area. However, Fr. Monserrate and Jahāngīr give the name of the tank as Kapūrtalāu.¹¹ Badāūnī mentions the existence of a structure which he calls the *ḥujra-i Anūptalāu* (the room of the Anūptalāu) where the emperor used sometimes to hold religious discussions.¹² Fr. Monserrate in one of his letters to the Provincial, Fr. Rue Vicente, speaks more explicitly about this place when he writes:

[On] Saturday, the day set aside for hearing the things of God, all three of us [Frs. Acquaviva, Henrique and Monserrate] went to the palace 'Darigiana' (*daulatkhāna*), and when it was time, the King having himself

⁸ Monserrate, p.211.

⁹ See Plate I.

¹⁰ Badāūnī, II, p.215. At another place Badāūnī calls it the 'imārat (building) of Anūptalāu', *ibid.*, II, p.201.

¹¹ Monserrate, p.28; *Tuzuk-i Jahāngīrī*, Ghazipur & Aligarh, 1863-4, p.260. Qandhārī, like Badāūnī, refers to Anūptalāu (*Tārīkh-i Akbarī*, Rampur, 1962, p.151).

¹² Badāūnī, II, p.208.

six of his mullahs of the most knowledgeable, he sent for us and we went up to a *veranda* where he is wont to speak at other times ...¹³

... he [Akbar] was listening out of courtesy, for while not a point escaped him and he asked somethings in order to understand better what was being read, he was nodding, making believe that he was sleeping, and on the other hand he cast his very bright eyes all about the *room* taking stock of the persons with the dissimulation of a very prudent and wise man.¹⁴

This evidence explicitly indicates that the so-called 'Turkish Sulṭāna's chamber' and the cloistered verandah around it are the structures which Badāūnī calls by the name of *hujra-i Anūptalāu*. The cloisters, apart from being used to seat the people called for interview by the emperor,¹⁵ also shielded the area of the *daulatkhāna-i Anūptalāu* from the *daulat-khāna-i khāṣ*. To the west of the *hujra-i Anūptalāu*, and connected through the cloistered double passage with it, is a structure which is sometimes erroneously called a 'girls' school'.¹⁶ Athar Abbas Rizvi appears to be correct in calling it the 'Abdārkhāna and Fruit Store', where food and beverages for the emperor were stored.¹⁷ The *Khilwatkadah-i khāṣ* and the *Khwābgāh* are also situated in this area.¹⁸

To the east of the *Khilwatkada-i khāṣ* and the *Khwābgāh* structure are two rooms which have traditionally been assigned in the front has variously been identified as the 'pantry' or the 'library'. Rizvi, on the other hand, finds several uses for various purposes. One is situated at the back, and provided with a raised platform: this has been identified as the *Dīwān-khāna-i khāṣ* by Athar Abbās Rizvi,¹⁹ whereas the one situated it. He writes that it 'was used as Akbar's private library, for informal chats with distinguished guests, and a dining hall.'²⁰ We are informed that there was a *khizāna-i Anūptalāu* or the treasury of Anūp Talāu.²¹ Possibly this

¹³ *Letters from the Mughal Court: The First Jesuit Mission to Akbar (1580-1583)*, ed. John Correia-Afonso, Bombay, 1980, p.72.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.74.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.83.

¹⁶ S.K. Banerji, 'Akbar's Dārū'l *Khilāfat*, Fatehpur-Sikri', *Journal of Indian History*, 1942, p.211.

¹⁷ S.A.A. Rizvi & V.J.A. Flyn, *Fatehpur Sikri*, Bombay, 1975, p.35.

¹⁸ For details on this, see *ibid.*, pp.28-9.

¹⁹ Rizvi, *op.cit.*, p.26.

²⁰ Ibid., p.26. Fr. Heras, 'The Palace of Akbar at Fatehpur Sikri', *Journal of Indian History*, 1925, pp.61-2, erroneously calls it the dining hall.

²¹ Abū'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, III, p.246.

building would more appropriately have performed this purpose. The hollow walls with sliding panels would be more suited for this purpose than any other.

Beyond the *Abdārkhāna* is the courtyard of the *daulat-khāna-i khāṣ* with the famous Panch Mahal, the so-called 'Treasury of Gold and Silver' (*Ānkh Michaulī*) and 'the Jewel House' (the lotus-pillar chamber). It is generally believed that the contemporary Persian sources are totally silent regarding them. But a perusal of the account of 'Ārif Qandhārī puts to rest this contention. Describing the courtyard of the *daulat-khāna* Qandhārī writes:

On one side of the *ṣaḥn* (courtyard) of that '*imārat* with sky-like roof, they have raised a *chahārkhāna*, *chahārṣuffā* and an *aiwān-khāna*, all carved out of red stone. Their *abvāb* (doors) and *shibāk* (screens) have been wrought in such a way that the keeper of the eight-doored heaven cannot enter a claim of equality...²²

The *Chahārkhāna* is a square chamber with openings on all its four sides. This is a clear reference to the hall of the lotus-pillar, which is situated on the northern side of the courtyard, and is a perfect square. To the north-west of the courtyard is the Panch Mahal, which is a four-storeyed structure surmounted with a cupola: *Chahārṣuffā* means a structure with four platforms or floors. Between these two structures stands the so-called Treasury, which comprises three large porticos or *aiwāns*; thus the term *aiwānkhāna*. Interestingly, all the three were once provided with perforated screens (*shibāk*).

Badāūnī mentions that in AH 985/1577 Akbar ordered the construction of a square *ḥauṣ* (tank) with each side measuring 20 yards and a depth of 3 yards. In the middle of it was constructed *ḥujra* (room), on the top of which was raised *mīnāra-i buland* (a high tower). On all the four sides of the room were placed cause-ways (*pul*).²³ Abū'l Fazl also gives the same dimensions.²⁴ Badāūnī mentions that this *ḥauṣ*, which was constructed in 1577, was 'filled with *zar-i siyāh* (copper coins) to an amount of 20 kror'. Qandhārī says that the *talāu* (tank) 'placed in that *ṣaḥn* (courtyard)' was in 986 AH/ 1578-9 emptied of water and filled with 'copper, silver and gold *tankas*'.²⁵ Abū'l Fazl gives the same information for the

²² Qandhārī, p.151.

²³ Badāūnī, II, pp.264-5.

²⁴ Abū'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, Calcutta, 1887, III, pp.141-2.

²⁵ Qandhārī, p.152.

same year.²⁶

Jahāngīr, on the other hand, mentions a *ḥauṣ* in the courtyard, which he calls 'Kāpūr Talāu' and gives its measurement as 36 yards square and 4½ yards deep. This was also filled with copper coins up to the brim.²⁷

The question arises whether this tank was the same as *ḥauṣ-i Anūptalāu* if one goes by the latter's dimensions given by Abū'l Fazl. Like the *Anūptalāu*, this tank too had causeways. But then Badāūnī mentions the year of construction of the *Anūptalāu* as 1575-6 (AH 983)²⁸ — i.e. two years before he mentions the construction of this second tank. Secondly, the latter tank is said to have been surmounted with a high tower, which unfortunately is missing now. The statement of Badāūnī regarding the existence of this tower is authenticated by two *Akbarnāma* paintings, in both of which a tower is depicted somewhere behind the *dīwān-i 'ām*.²⁹ Thus one can safely say that the *daulatkhāna* once had two tanks: the *Anūptalāu* and a second one. Is it, then, the one which Jahāngīr mentions as 'Kāpūrtalāu'?

Another problem relating to the 'first palace' of Akbar, as mentioned by Monserrate, is about the location of the emperor's dining hall. If it was not located near the *Khilwat-kada* and the *dīwānkhāna-i khāṣ*, then where was it? An answer to this problem is given by Monserrate himself. While describing the private dining chamber the Father writes:

In his dining-hall he had pictures of Christ, Mary, Moses and Muḥammad; when naming them he showed his true sentiments by putting Muḥammad last; for he would say, 'This is the picture of Christ, this of Mary, this of Moses and that of Muhammad'...³⁰

Further on he writes:

His table is very sumptuous, generally consisting of more than forty courses served in great dishes. These are brought into the royal dining-hall covered and wrapped in linen cloths... They are carried by youths to the door of the dining-hall, other servants walking ahead and the master-of-the-household following. Here they are taken over by eunuchs, who hand them to the serving girls who wait on the royal table. He is accustomed to dine in private, except on the occasion of a public banquet...³¹

²⁶ *Akbarnāma*, III, p.246.

²⁸ Badāūnī, II, pp.200-1.

³⁰ Monserrate, p.29.

²⁷ *Tuzuk*, p.260.

²⁹ See Plates 1 & 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.199.

The second quotation points to the location of the dining-hall which must have been at a place where the men were not allowed to enter. To the west of the cloisters of the *daulatkhāna-i Anūptalāu*, not very far from the *ābdārkhāna*, where the food is supposed to have been laid out, is a private door which opens towards what now appears to be the *ḥaramsarā* or ladies' quarters. This door leads one from the *daulatkhāna* to a structure which is popularly known as 'Sunahra Makān' or 'Maryam's quarters', which in turn was originally screened off from the rest of the *ḥaramsarā* with the help of walls, towards the *Ḥaramsarā* offices, and the gate of the Principal *Ḥaramsarā* ('Jodhbai's Palace'). Another wall screened off this structure towards the *Ḥaramsarā* garden. Thus, in other words, 'Maryam's house', although outside the *daulatkhāna*, was yet not a part of the *ḥaramsarā*. This building could easily be visited by occupants of both the palaces. Its central chamber is provided with *ṭāqs* (niches) on which some traces of portraits can still be discerned. On one of the *ṭāqs* (the south-east) of the central chamber is depicted a portrait of a woman in European fashion.³² The eastern and western facades of this building depict winged personages, who to Smith appeared to be angels.³³ Wall paintings are profuse in this building, depicting a court scene, elephant fights, and floral patterns which might well be scenes from the *Hamzanāmah* or some such other work.³⁴

These paintings might have misled Monserrate, as they did Smith, into believing that they depicted Christian themes. The lady in the *ṭāq* might well be thought to have represented Mary.

If it was the quarters of a woman, howsoever exalted she might have been, the numerous hunting, battle and siege scenes would be quite out of place. It would thus appear that this building is the 'dining-hall' of Akbar described by Monserrate.

Another structure which has been mentioned in the sources but has so far defied proper identification is the School for the Princes. Monserrate makes it clear that this 'school' was inside the palace itself:

Friday morning I went to the palace, and when I reached it, the King was entering the place where we teach and, when I had greeted him, he made

³² See plate 3.

³³ See plates 4 & 5.

³⁴ For a detailed description see Rizvi, pp.53-5.

a sign that I should enter within...³⁵

A closer look at the so-called 'ḥaramsarā guest-house' reveals that it is connected with the *daulatkhāna* through a passage near the structure which we have defined as the *Aiwānkhāna*. This is definitely separated from the *ḥaramsarā* with the help of a huge gateway which opens towards the *ḥaramsarā* garden. The central chamber of this so-called 'guest house' is also well suited for a prince to study under the eyes of occupants of both the main palace and the *ḥaramsarā*. Was this the school or nursery of the young imperial princes whom the Jesuits taught?

As far as the 'second palace' of Monserrate is concerned, much has been written about it by authorities like Rizvi and Petruccioli.³⁶ But what about the 'third palace', the prince's quarters? Rizvi maintains that the area near the so-called Tānsen's *bāradarī*, in front of Curzon's Dak Bungalow, was the area of Prince Salīm's quarters.³⁷ But subsequent excavations in that area have brought to light only some 'nobles' structures'. The only place where a person of Prince Salīm's stature could have resided can be the so-called 'Ḥakīm's quarters', which although separated from the imperial quarters are yet the nearest and grandest. No noble could have been allowed to live in an area so close to the *Khwābgāh* and the waterworks which supplied the required water to the imperial baths and the Anūptalāu.

As far as the *kārkhānas* are concerned, they were also within the palace or very near it. Monserrate in one of his letters says: 'The King is a mechanic and has all sorts of craftsmen within the palace enclosure...' ³⁸ He further writes that Akbar used to walk from the *dīwān-i 'ām* to the 'gun-maker's workshop' situated nearby.³⁹ In his *Commentaries*, he explains:

...he has built a workshop near the palace, where also are studios and workrooms for the finer and more reputable arts, such as painting, goldsmith-work, tapestry-making, carpet and curtain-making, and the manufacture of arms.⁴⁰

³⁵ *Jesuit Letters*, p.85.

³⁶ Rizvi, *op.cit.*; A. Petruccioli, *La Citta' Del Sole & Delle Acque Fatehpur Sikri*, Rome, 1988.

³⁷ Rizvi, p.24.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.35-6.

³⁸ *Jesuit Letters*, p.37, also 81.

⁴⁰ Monserrate, p.201.

It appears that the area from the imperial workshop ('Mint') to the Hathipol was given to *Yatash-khānas* or offices-cum-residences of the various officials. Adjoining the northern wall of the *Dīwān-i 'Ām* is situated the kitchen establishment, along with the *Yatashkhāna* of the Superintendent of Kitchen Establishment, Muḥammad Bāqir. Further on, below the *Hauz-i shīrīn*, is the house of the Superintendent of Animals. This *Yatashkhāna* adjoins the *chītah-khāna*, *fīlkhāna*, etc, which have been recently excavated. This series of offices and officers' residences continues till beyond the Hathipol, behind which on the ridge stands the house which is directly connected with steps to the so-called *farrāsh-khāna* or *sarāi* near the Hiran Mīnār. Architecturally, the structure of this 'sarāi' appears to be the same as that of other Akbarī buildings. Qandhārī writes in the plural (*sarā-hā*) when he mentions the construction of sarāis at Fatehpur Sikri by Akbar.⁴¹ But then Wāriṣ informs us that in AH 1064/1655 Shāhjahān ordered the construction of a palace (*Daulatkhāna*) overlooking the lake.⁴²

R.C. Gaur, in his presidential address above cited,⁴³ mentions a massive structure situated between the 'Samosa Maḥal', the Chishti quarters, the Jāmi' Mosque and the house of the Superintendent of the 'sarāi' of Hiran Mīnār. He identified it as the 'Mīnār Hāramsarā'. The mere location rules it out as the residence of any women of the reigning emperor, for they could never have been allowed to reside in an area containing bureaucratic establishments. Yet the structure is on such a massive scale that it can also not be identified as a nobleman's house. It consists of two hammams, a *chahār-bāgh*, an underground water reservoir and an open tank, apart from a large number of rooms. The walls of this structure and its hammams are profusely painted with floral patterns of a shining maroon colour. The plan as drawn by Gaur fails to show any opening or entrance into the structure. But closer observation revealed a massive door which, during some late renovations, was converted into a room. This gate opened on the road leading from the Hāthipol to the Chishti quarters and Rang Maḥal. To its north is a breath taking view of the lake. Thus, instead of the *Mīnār*

⁴¹ Qandhārī, p.150.

⁴² Wāriṣ, *Badhshāhnāma*, transcript of Rampur MS in Department of History, AMU, II, pp.244,284.

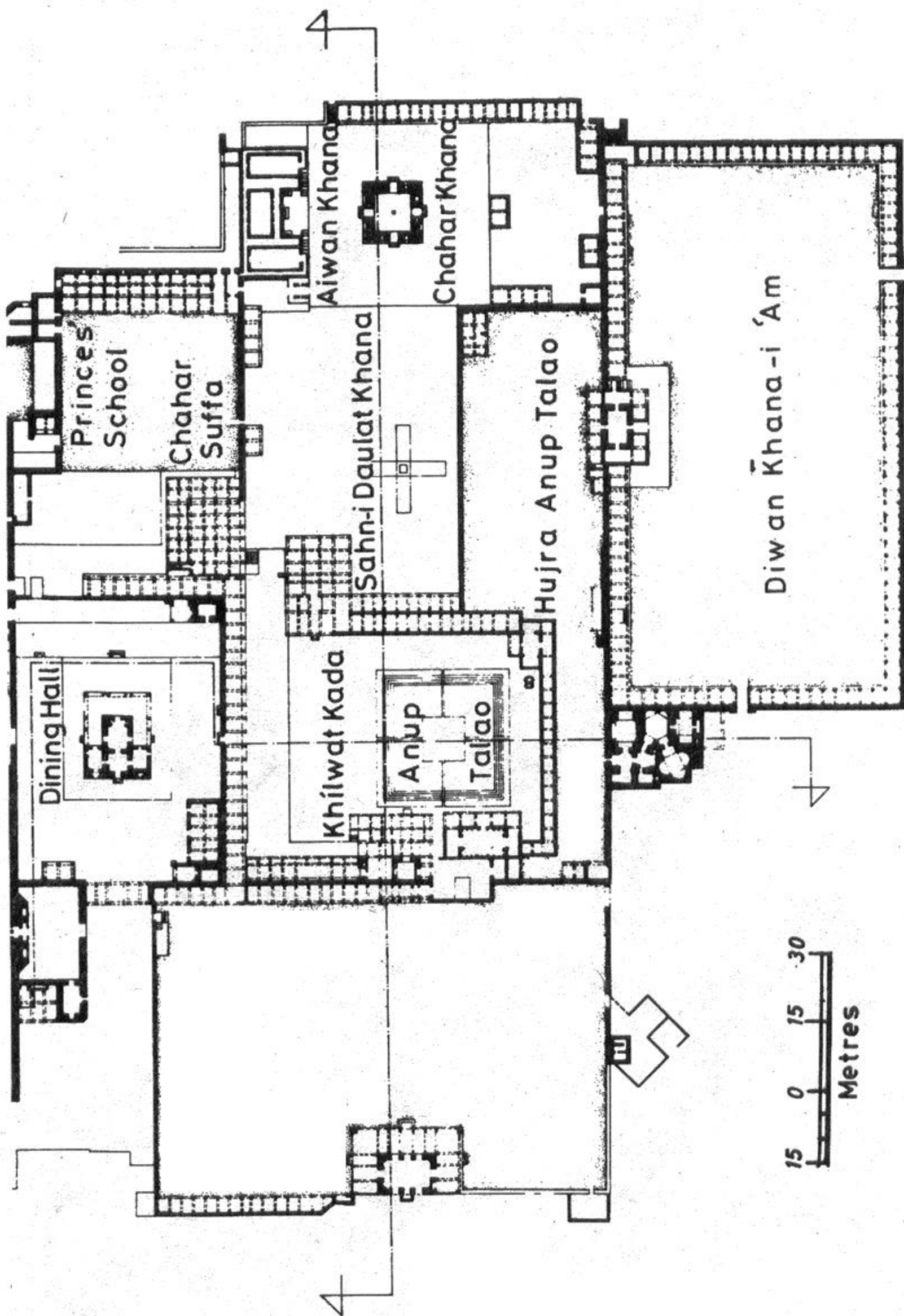
⁴³ R.C. Gaur, *op.cit.*

ḥaramsarā, this magnificent building appears to have been the palace built by Shāhjahān when the palace complex of Akbar and the bureaucratic quarters had both been abandoned.⁴⁴

Although profusely written about, Fatehpur Sikri appears to be an inexhaustible quarry for information regarding the age of Akbar. The shops from the *hiran mīnār* to the Ajmer darwāza, the Indarawali area along with its platforms, buildings, wells, tanks and *bāolīs*, the area around Bīrpol, Gwalior darwāza and the structures on the ridge, all need detailed studies to unravel the mysteries of this city built by so unique a genius.

⁴⁴ See my mimeographed paper, 'Post-Akbar Fatehpur Sikri' presented at the 8th session of U.P. History Congress, Varanasi, Feb. 1994.

DAULAT KHANA (PALACE), FATEHPUR SIKRI



Plan based on Petruccioli

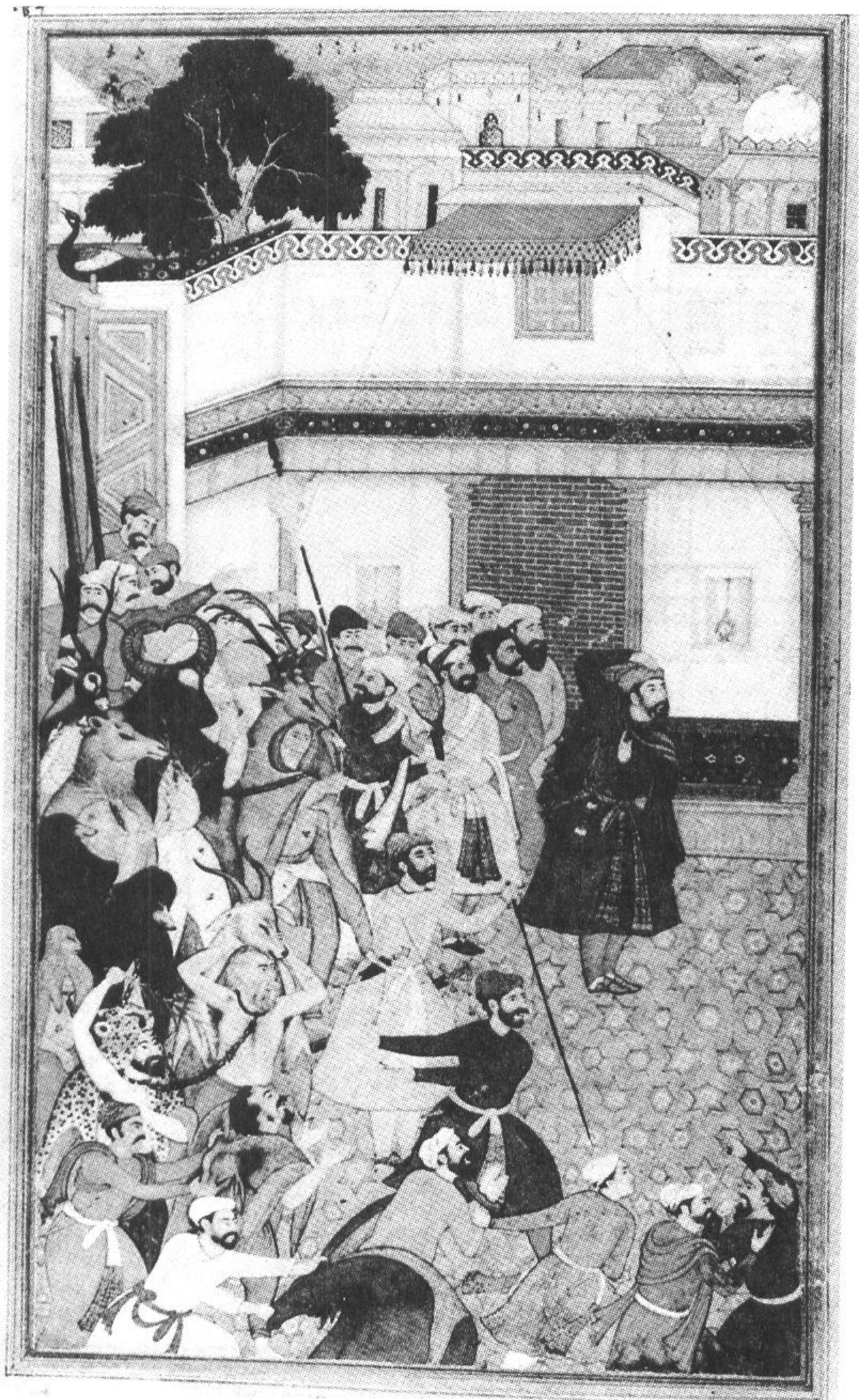


Plate 1. The tumblers, by Basāwan and Manṣūr.



Plate 2. Court scene by Ḥusain Naqqāsh and Kesav.



Plate 3. Wall-painting of woman in European dress in 'Maryam's House'.



Plate 4. Winged angels in wall-paintings in 'Maryam's house'.



Plate 5. Winged angels in wall-paintings in 'Maryam's House'.